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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement*/ submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 March 2000]

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*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Since 1990 over two million children have been killed in armed conflicts worldwide. During 1999 Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker has observed with great concern how children in East Timor, the Sudan and Sri Lanka have been the victims of expulsion and civil war. In Sri Lanka both the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) liberation movement have been guilty of violating the basic rights of children. Over one million children have been killed, injured or forced to flee their homes during a civil war that has lasted 16 years. The opposing parties show less and less concern for the fate of the civilian population. For example 21 Tamils died when the Sri Lankan air force bombed the market place in the town of Puthukkudiruppu on 15 September 1999. Three days later 38 inhabitants of three villages, including 11 children, were slaughtered by the LTTE in an act of reprisal. These attacks mean that both parties to the conflict are in violation of Art. 3 of the Geneva Conventions on the Protection of Civilians in Times of War. We have also noted with concern that, contrary to assurances that were given to the UN in 1998, the LTTE continues to recruit children under 17 years old to the armed struggle. For example in October 1999 more than 40 LTTE fighters aged between 11 and 14 years old were killed in clashes with the Sri Lankan army. Only an end to the war can stop the continuing violation of children's basic rights. However Sri Lanka is a long way away from achieving a peaceful solution. The territorial gains made by the LTTE during the autumn of 1999 have demonstrated the failure of the government's policy of securing peace through war. A peaceful solution to the conflict will not be achieved without international mediation. That is why we are appealing to the UN Commission for Human Rights to press all parties to the conflict to agree to internationally-mediated peace negotiations conducted under the auspices of the UN and to guarantee the safety of the civilian population.

In Sudan likewise children in particular have suffered as a result of the civil war that has continued uninterruptedly since 1983. For example, during the summer of 1999 over 50,000 children in the Western Upper Nile region were not vaccinated against measles because of continuous fighting between opposing factions armed by the Sudanese army. For months the authorities refused to allow relief flights to take place. On numerous occasions hospitals and other clearly-marked humanitarian facilities operated by international aid organisations were bombed by the Sudanese air force. We are urging the UN Commission for Human Rights to condemn the obstruction of humanitarian work in Sudan and to call on the UN Secretary-General to press for an end to the genocide in Sudan that has claimed over two million victims.

Children in East Timor have also been the particular victims of serious human rights violations. For example, over 500 East Timorese children died in refugee camps in West Timor as a consequence of totally inadequate supplies of humanitarian aid and the deliberate obstruction of relief agency operations by the Indonesian authorities and pro-Indonesian militia. The number of children who suffered human rights violations in East Timor in 1999 is still unknown. Over 500,000 East Timorese were forced to flee their homes or deported by militia armed by the Indonesian Army and taking orders from them. We are calling on the UN Commission for Human Rights to support the establishment of an International Tribunal for East Timor that will bring those responsible for serious violations of human rights to account. In the absence of an independent judiciary, an internal inquiry conducted in Indonesia can offer no guarantee that the high-ranking generals and ministers responsible will also be charged and sentenced.